

BLANCHE AMES AMES

(1878–1969)

AN APPRECIATION

THROUGH most of her long life, Blanche Ames Ames cherished a unique and meaningful relationship with the Botanical Museum, a closeness severed only by death at her home in Borderland, North Easton, Massachusetts, on March 1, 1969.

Wife and lifelong helpmeet of Professor Oakes Ames, second director of the Botanical Museum, Blanche Ames never held an official appointment as a member of the Museum staff. Nevertheless, her contributions to the life of the institution were so profound that they will always be appreciated in the educational and research activities of the Museum and, through it, will continue to be widely recognized in the world of botany.

Mrs. Ames was an early champion of women's suffrage, a leader in civic and charitable affairs and an author; but perhaps she will be most widely acknowledged as an artist. Her botanical etchings and pen and ink drawings are displayed in the Botanical Museum and in the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and her oil paintings hang at Harvard, Dartmouth, Columbia, Phillips Exeter Academy, the Mississippi State Hall of Governors and in several private collections.

Her interest in botanical artistry began when, at the Ames Botanical Laboratory at North Easton, she started

to illustrate her husband's publications on new species of Philippine orchids. When Professor Ames transferred his activities to the Museum and installed there the Ames Orchid Herbarium and Library, she intensified her efforts, producing over a period of some fifty years literally hundreds of outstanding line drawings of orchids. When the University added the supervision of the Arnold Arboretum to Professor Ames' duties, Mrs. Ames undertook the preparation of drawings of a number of horticulturally important shrubs.

In the 1920's, Professor Ames turned his attention to economic botany, and his wife began to illustrate plants of use to man. Especially noteworthy was Mrs. Ames' preparation, under her husband's guidance, of the now famous "Ames Charts of Economic Plants". The teaching of Harvard University's course in Economic Botany, offered for many years by Professor Ames, was organized around these four colorful wall charts depicting important economic species arranged on a "phylogenetic tree", in accordance with the Engler-Prantl System. Still in use to-day, the charts have helped interpret plant classification to hundreds of students for more than fifty years and have stamped a unique character on Harvard's teaching in this interdisciplinary field.

When Professor Ames established a press in the Museum in the early 1930's and initiated publication of the *Botanical Museum Leaflets, Harvard University* and occasional books, Mrs. Ames' artistry vitalized the research papers that were printed. Among the books produced on this press and illustrated by Mrs. Ames are "Orchids in Retrospect", "Drawings of Florida Orchids" and "Economic Annuals and Human Cultures". Her line drawings have likewise been widely reproduced in many monographs, floras and manuals issued by other botanical institutions and by commercial publishers.

Mrs. Ames was an accomplished portrait artist. Examples of this aspect of her artistic contribution, hanging in the Botanical Museum, consist of life-sized oil paintings of the Museum's three directors: Professor George Lincoln Goodale, Professor Oakes Ames, and Professor Paul C. Mangelsdorf. It is unique to have the portraits of three men whose service spanned a period of 79 years—from 1888 to 1967—painted by a single artist.

'Truly a great lady and an outstanding artist, Blanche Ames' influence will long be felt in botany, for she spent a great part of her life interpreting the beauty of plants for others. This characteristic of her life was appropriately stressed at memorial services for Mrs. Ames by the Rev. Mr. Edmund Palmer Clarke of the Unitarian Church of North Easton. "If Mrs. Ames had been a man, we would have said of her that she was 'a man of parts'. . . a person of much ability and many talents. . . Those of you who knew her best will see the aptness of my using the phrase to describe her. Perhaps even better, now that she has gone from us, is Shelley's. . . : 'She is a portion of the loveliness which once she made more lovely. . . ' For this was her greatest talent—to know nature—to reproduce it in her drawings for those less perceptive than she, and to give expression to those things which made us better because she had lived amongst us."

The staff of the Museum can think of no better way of expressing its appreciation of Blanche Ames' devotion to botanical art than to present, on the very press that has known so well her skillful pen, a selection of her artistic and scientific contributions.

—RICHARD EVANS SCHULTES

PLATE LXVI

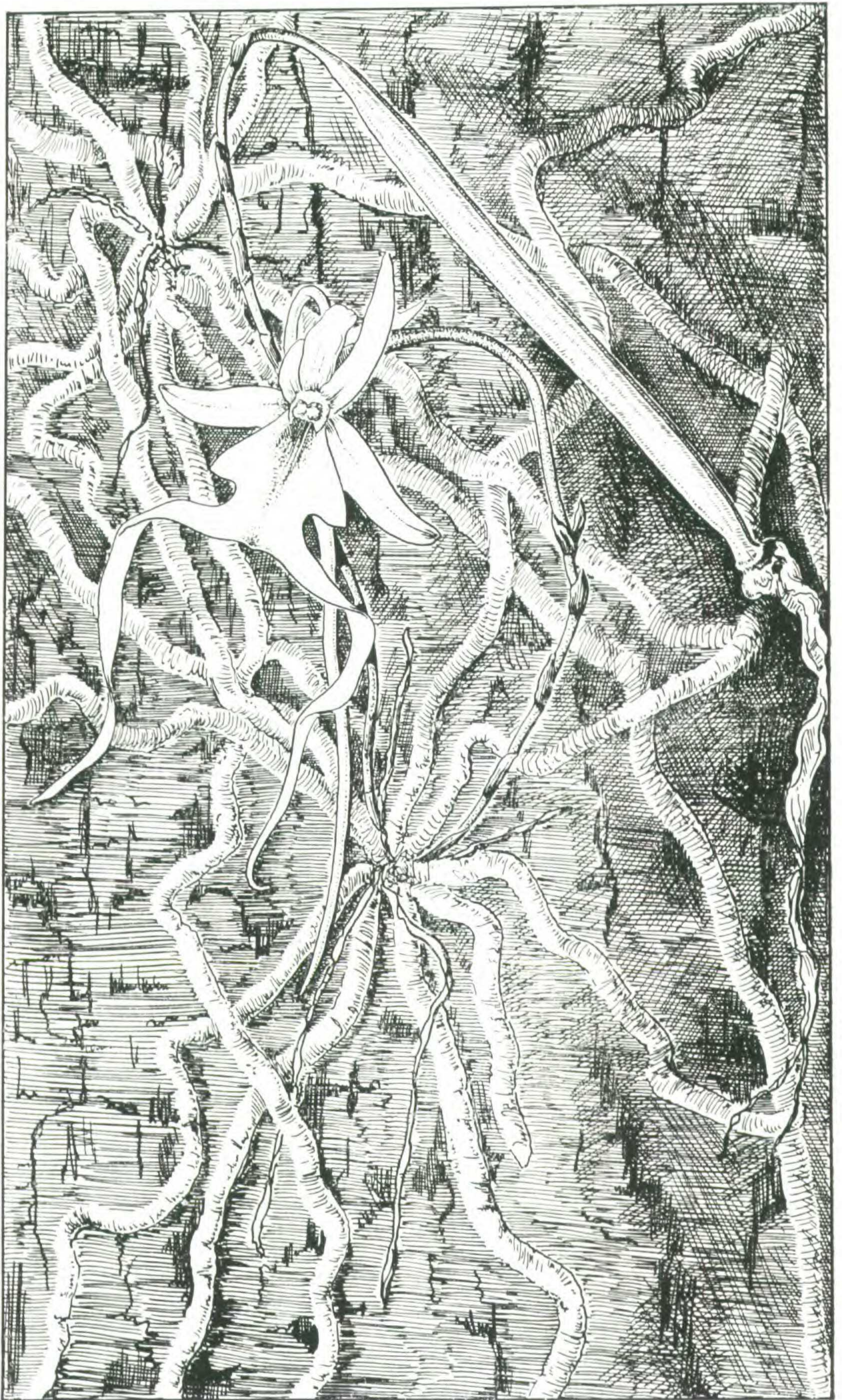


BLANCHE AMES AMES

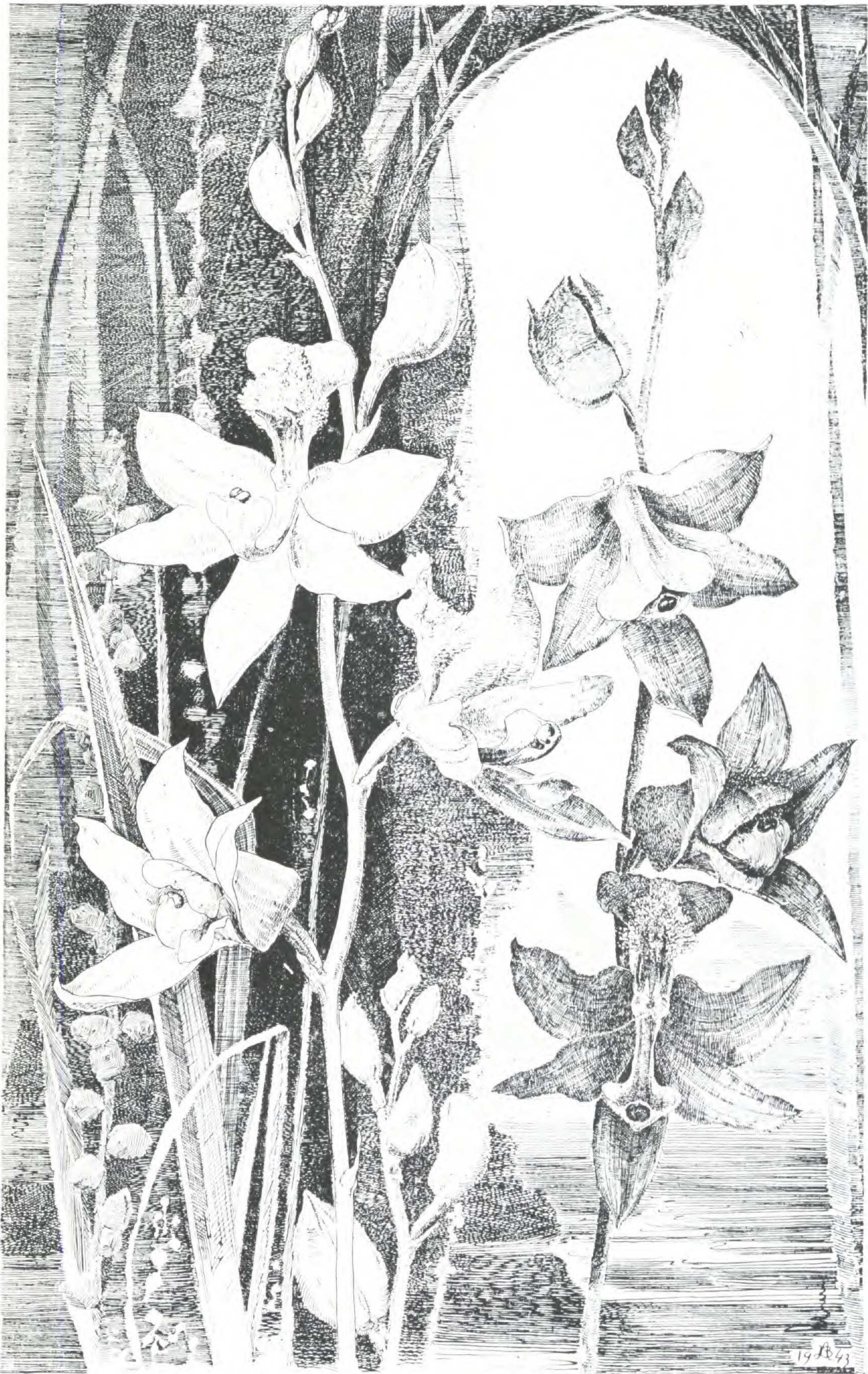


Davidia involuerata *Baill.*
(Dove Tree)

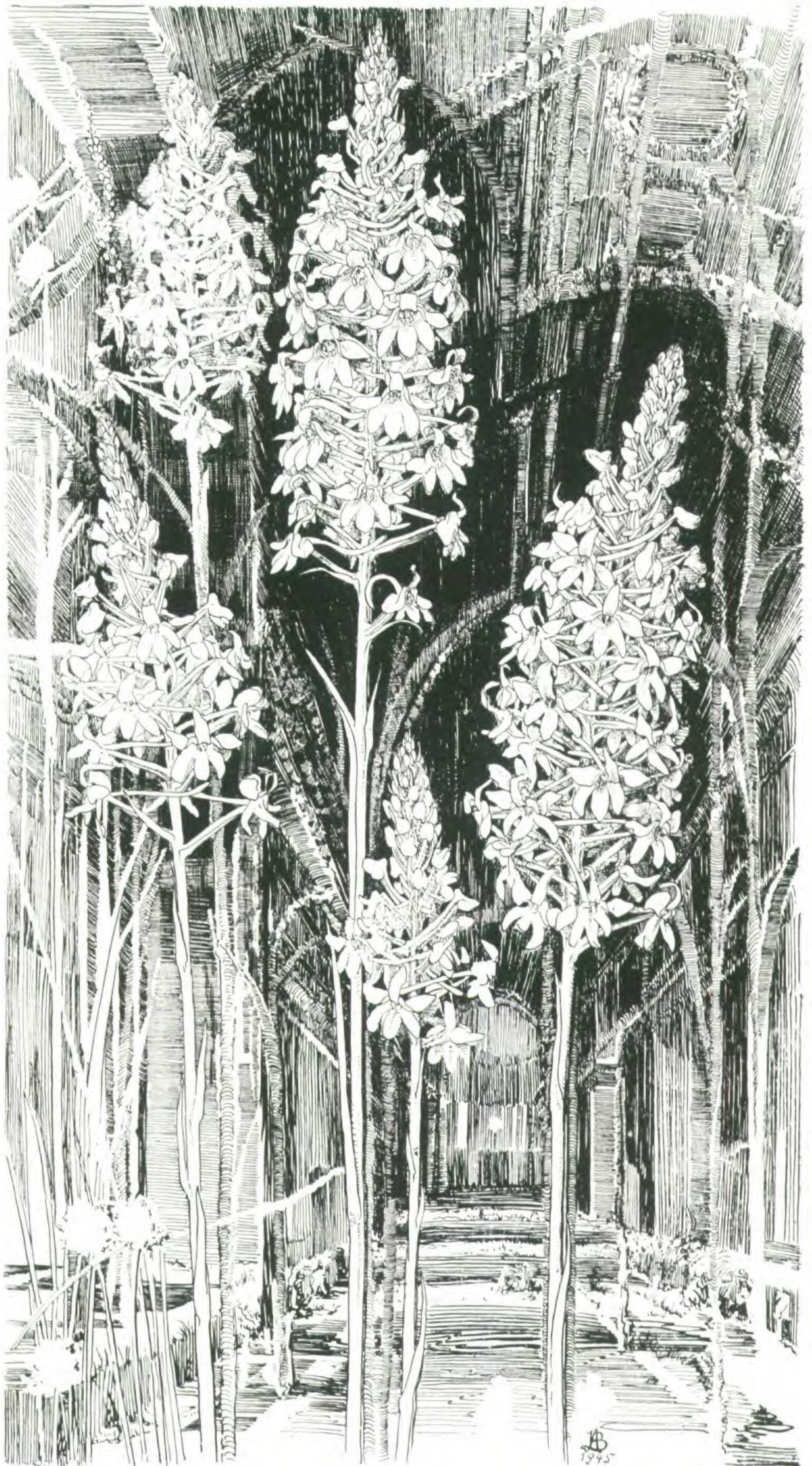
PLATE LXVIII



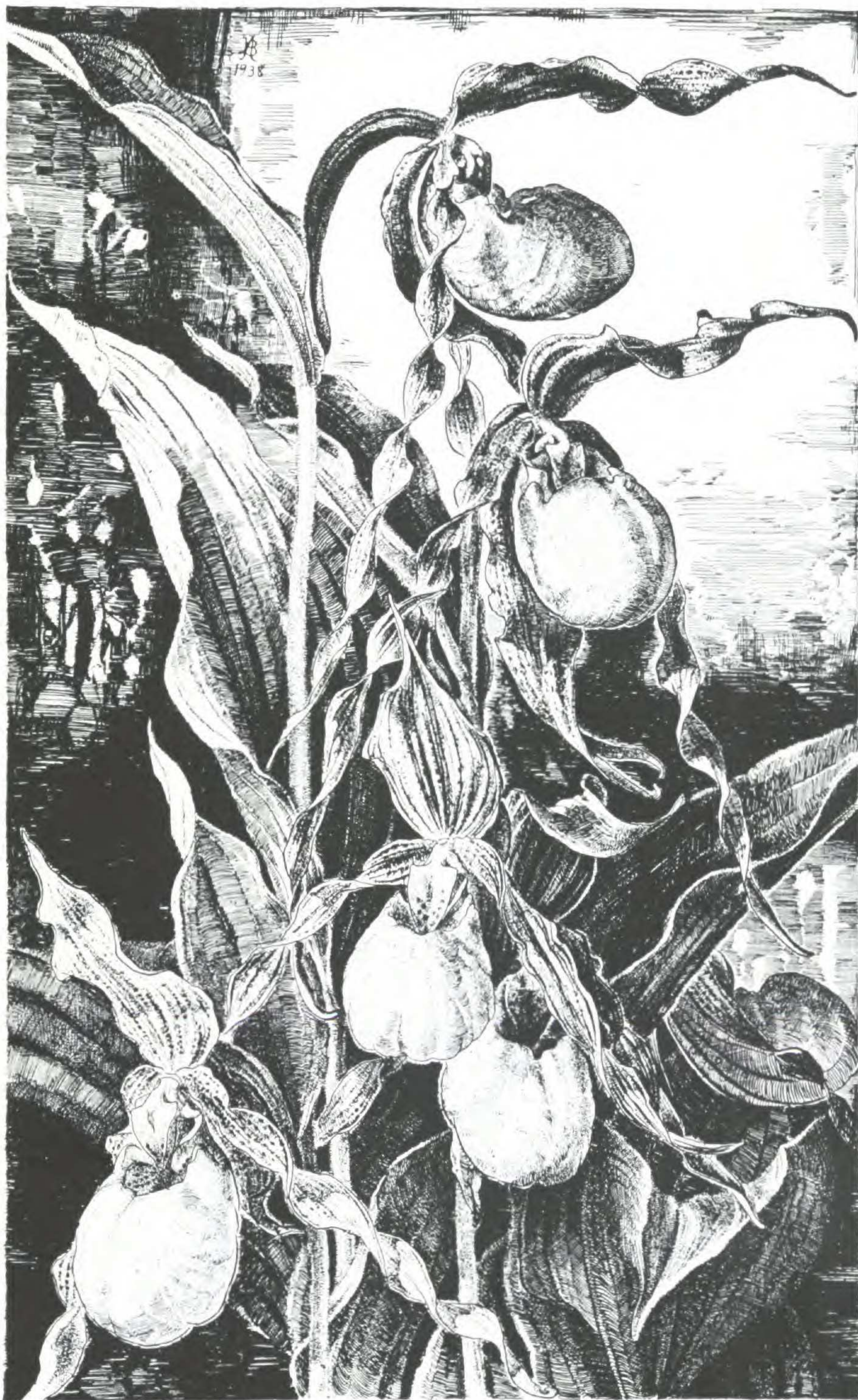
Polyradicium Lindenii (Lindl.) Garay



Calopogon pulchellus (Salisb.) R. Br.



Habenaria nivea (Nutt.) Spreng.



Cypripedium Calceolus L.
var. *pubescens* (*Willd.*) *Correll*

PLATE LXXII



Epidendrum tampense Lindl.



Blanche Ames Ames and Oakes Ames



STELIS *pendulispica* Ames